

LutheranWoman

June 2008

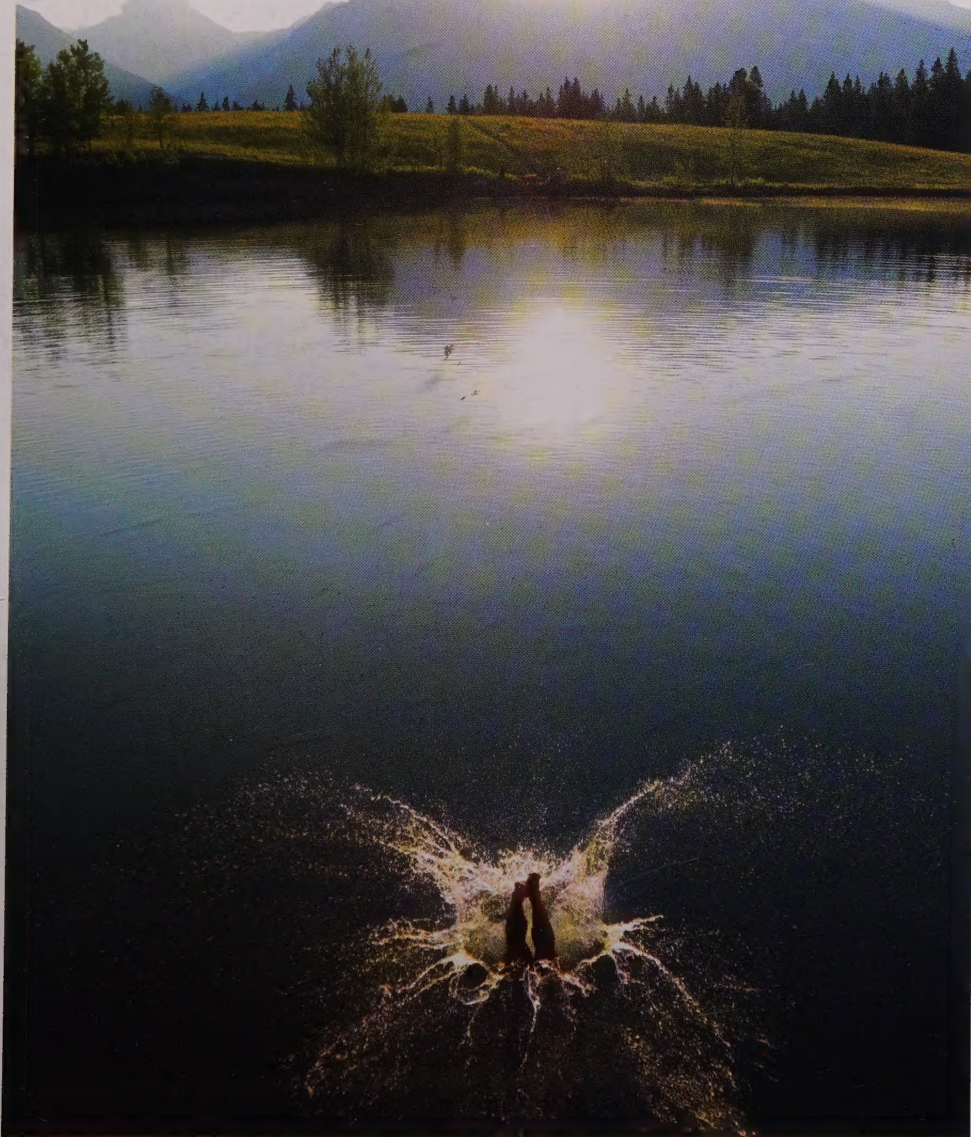
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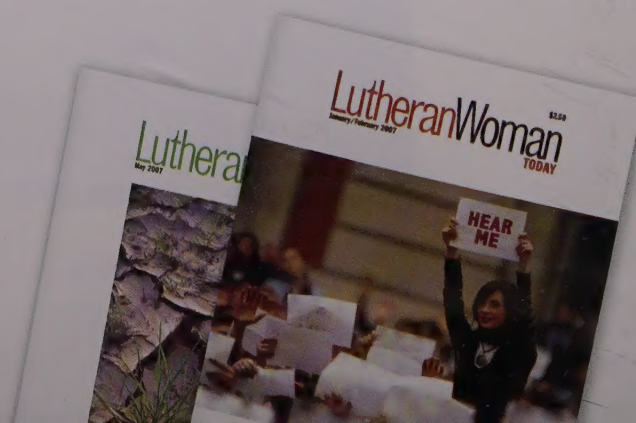
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COME TO THE WATERS

VOLUME 21 NUMBER 5 JUNE 2008

Water and baptism are bound together not only in the use of water for the rite, but also in powerful images of birth and death, renewal and cleansing.

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VOICES

Soaking Wet

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

Have you ever had your water turned off? Last fall, a city work crew hit a water main while repairing the street in front of my home. The city turned off the water for nearly six hours while they fixed the hole. It doesn't sound like a huge burden—six hours without running water. But if you've ever gone through it, you know what a disruption it is. You go to rinse off a plate, or make some tea, or wash your hands—you turn the handle and the faucet hisses but nothing comes out. You consider using the pitcher of water in the fridge, but decide against it—who knows how long you might be without water. When the water came back on I was so relieved; I thought I'd never take water for granted again.

This summer, our Bible study "Come to the Waters" explores the sacrament of baptism. The June session focuses on images of water in Scripture. Author Karen Bockelman writes, "You may be feeling a bit over your head in all this water, but we've barely gotten a sprinkling. Once you start looking for it, the Bible is soaking wet!"

When we think of water, we usually think of its benefits. It's easy to underestimate water's power. Lisa Swanson Faleide in "Come a Flood" describes water as a force to be reckoned with. "Those of us who had power watched our TVs in horror and disbelief as downtown Grand Forks, with four feet of water in the streets, burned, some buildings down to the waterline," she writes about the flood of 1997. She goes on to

tell us about the impact of that disaster on her family and the community.

For Christians, water has an even deeper significance. It reminds us of our baptism—our death and new life in Christ. In "Christ's Body in the World," Julie Aageson writes that her parish community celebrates and remembers baptism in an intentional way: "We continue to gather around the font for remembrances of baptism, for the Easter season readings, and whenever else we need reassuring images of life-giving water."

Martha Stortz in "Consolations of Baptism," tells us that remembering our baptism blesses us: "As a daily practice, baptism offers us three much-needed consolations: a reminder of who and whose we really are, compassion and the invitation to be Christ's hands in the world, and direction for the journey ahead."

One of the important aspects of baptism is how it brings us into the family of God as we are each given the name "Child of God." Baptismal sponsors—godparents—can help remind us of that relationship. In "People of the Cloud," Rod Boriack shares how his experiences with his godchildren shape them—and him. He encourages us, even if we are not godparents, to remember that "you are among the cloud of witnesses that God has called to strengthen and sustain the faith and lives of others."

This summer, reflect on what water does, and remember the promises of your baptism with joy. 🌿

Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*. You can write to her at LWT@elca.org.



VE US THIS DAY

ess than s Contents

Marj Leegard

Our ancestors in the faith were dry-land people. When they described the ultimate it was always in terms of plenty: streams of water cascading down from the heights, springs of cool water, healing pools, baptismal rivers. The descriptions pictured flowing wells in the midst of arid thirst. Children call out in the night, "I need a drink of water." No matter what they really want, it is contained in that universal nighttime thirst.

When Jerome's father was packing up to move into town, he told me that he had taken everything he wanted. "Take whatever you can use and we'll get rid of the rest," he said.

I went to look and there was the old baptismal bowl from the church. When the new silver bowl was brought in years ago, the thrifty Norwegian ladies had sold the old stoneware bowl at the Ladies Aid sale, and Jerome's mother had bought it. Next to the bowl was a motley collection of water glasses, giveaways from gas stations. They'd be fine for our daughter's playhouse, so I took the glasses and the big old white bowl.

Before I put my collection in the car I called out to Jerome's father to look and see if he was sure about what I had taken. I heard him say, "No, I think I'll keep this." I thought that he had chosen the bowl, but as I met him in the doorway he was holding the box of water glasses. "They might come in handy," he said.

The bowl is on a shelf in my dining room. When I look at its shape I wonder how the ladies managed to find a silver

bowl that fit in the hollow in the dark wood stand. I wonder how many congregation council motions and seconds it took to make the change.

When I see that old bowl I think about all the babies (and some who weren't that young) who came to that source of cleansing water. I remember one little girl who complained loudly to the pastor, "You spilled water on my new dress." Many of those baptized have gone to distant places; they come back to help us celebrate our anniversaries. Some stayed on the home farm and ended their days where they had begun, living a lifetime of faithfulness in that place where they heard the words of new birth.

These baptized ones walked through the years that were given, sent out born anew of the water in that old bowl with these words, "... God has made these new sisters and brothers members of the priesthood we all share in Christ Jesus, that we may proclaim the praise of God and bear his creative and redeeming Word to all the world" (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, Service of Holy Baptism).

The old bowl doesn't have any pretty roses painted on it, just rust stains from the water from the well. It would not excite the "Antiques Roadshow" viewers. Even the silver bowl is less than its contents. Water flows freely for everyone. It is a gift: "... the river of God is full of water" (Psalm 65:9). And so the old stoneware bowl lives on and the baptized people live on and so shall we. 🌿

Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.

GRAVITY

June 1997

Gravity
struck me
when a mug fell
from the cupboard
in my parents' home
and broke in two pieces
on my head.

I'm quite certain it broke on my head
since a triangular piece
fell in front of me
and the large piece with the handle
on it
fell neatly
right side up
into a ceramic cereal bowl
a few inches away.

It was my fault, really.
I had put the mugs into the cupboard
stacked two high
and didn't take care
to balance them properly.
I left an opening
and was enlightened
painfully
by a force of nature.

The winter of 1996–1997 was so mercurial on the northern plains, it became predictable.

You could forecast a full-on blizzard about every two weeks, and you'd be right about 90 percent of the time.

I had a nursing baby at home on the farm that winter, and two older sons, one a teen and one almost. My husband was starting a new business now that we had folded up our farming operation, a business that took him away from home about when every other blizzard broke out. This left the boys and me to wait it out alone without transportation or snow-clearing equipment—"excess" that had been sold at auction a couple of summers before.

But life had begun to improve since the birth of our third son just before Easter of the previous year. That red-haired, freckle-faced cherub I'd secretly longed for was the new life we all needed to help heal the scars of what was widely perceived as our farm failure. There is a photograph of our family taken

after the Easter service at our beloved country church, our faces shining with hope, my body full and round, blooming with mother love. At least that's what I see when I look at that photo in my mind's eye. Memory is my reality.

An aura of joy long repressed is almost tangible in the photos taken a few weeks later of our complete family gathered in front of the hand-carved antique baptismal font, our eldest son in his confirmation gown holding his newly baptized baby brother. Another photo shows his four baptismal sponsors, close friends I have dubbed "the four prairie godmothers," intent on and content in their new role. All married to farmers, control over their own fortunes, like mine, has often been tenuous. Yet here we had all gathered to celebrate baptism and affirmation of baptism. New life, water, and word—we were renewed.

by Lisa Swanson Faleide

Come a Flood

was at my parents' house
with my family—
were to clean up after
the flood
they said comes only twice
a millennium.

Excerpted from the poem "Gravity,"

by Lisa Swanson Faleide.

Read the poem in its entirety at

www.lutheranwomantoday.org.



vasive flood waters, such as this North Dakota resident experienced in his son's basement bedroom, can wreak havoc, displace families, and destroy property.

It was water—or not enough water, the drought of the late 1980s—that had been a principal cause of our losing the way of life we'd expected to continue into our old age. In an ironic turn of weather, a baptism of another sort awaited many of our neighbors, my parents in particular. It surely wasn't anything like the gentle, hope-imbued

ritual we'd just celebrated. In the family-speak usually reserved for a long, pounding rain: *Come a flood.*

Water, ice, and fire

As the interminable winter was passing into memory and our little one's first birthday brought more cherished photos, the Red River of the North melted too fast, got

jammed with ice floes, and overran its banks along the entire North Dakota and Minnesota border and into Canada all the way to Winnipeg.

Just a few years before, my parents had decided to leave the farm for careers in Fargo. They found a great house whose

large backyard ended at the banks of the normally placid Red River. One young grandchild upon first seeing the place asked, "Grandma, what I want to know is, is this a yard or is it a park?"

There was a floodwall protecting their walkout basement's door, a hint of what to watch out for on a hundred-year flood plain. Not far

away, a section of low-lying road would be closed for a week or two every year from seasonal flooding. For the most part, the yearly seasonal flooding was minor—easy to manage, dismiss, forget.

And then came the merciless winter of 1996–1997. There had been eight blizzards, each named in the style of hurricanes. A record 117 inches of snow fell on Fargo, 98.6 in nearby Grand Forks. The final blizzard, Hannah, added 6.3 more inches, starting with a freezing rain that weighed down power lines, making them droop in long curves from pole to pole alongside the roads. When high winds whipped across the state, the power lines snapped like thread. Hundreds of thousands of people were without power, some for over a week.

Uneasiness about that year's spring floods had begun early, and by March, the whole region was crossing its fingers. And praying. The dramatic weather in the weeks leading up to April 16, 1997, made for prime opportunities for ice jams, and the worst happened despite all those hopes and prayers.

The cold water overflowed the banks of the river, and then the dikes, and then the sandbags atop the dikes. Thousands of people had to evacuate. For Grand Forks, the baptism by flood included not only water and ice, but fire, too. Those of us who had power watched our TVs

in horror and disbelief as downtown Grand Forks, with four feet of water in the streets, burned, some buildings down to the waterline. Movie screenwriters would have scoffed at such an implausible disaster.

Sandbags and a better future

The mild-mannered river behind my parents' house in Fargo flooded the "park," of course, but the house stayed dry thanks to the hard work of friends and strangers who built a sandbag dike and to the good fortune of being just inches above the water's crest. But the next three weeks almost exhausted my parents. My father's constant vigilance over the pumps and the sandbags, and my mother's worry over his health as she fed an almost continuous stream of helpers nearly wore them out.

Finally the water subsided and it was time to remove the sandbags. The task was accomplished in short order, though it seemed like a lifetime since they'd been placed there. That weekend, just as my poem says, a cup fell out of the cupboard and broke on my head. It took another two months for that experience of "enlightenment" to ripen into a poem.

Last year, the region celebrated the 10-year anniversary of life after the flood and reflected on how the sour grapes of adversity had fermented miraculously into fine

wine. There is no experience like the communion of crisis to cement a community's resolve to make a better future. We also reflected again on the miracle that *not a single life was lost* in the flood.

To give thanks

Yes, the water "altered forever the sacred *home*," but mostly for the good. My parents decided to allow their home to be razed in order to turn the "park" into a protective dike. We nostalgically drive by the spot now, realizing that if you didn't know better, you'd think it had always been only grass and trees, just as it was before human settlement. While it would have been great for my folks to stay in that place, their new home is just as sacred as the first—because they are there.

Almost every other alteration has been good too. Grand Forks and East Grand Forks have experienced unprecedented rebuilding and new growth. The man who coordinated Fargo's emergency and flood response (and kept most of the city dry through his competent leadership) has been elected the city's mayor. Permanent dikes have been built where there had been none, and emergency plans have been perfected. Help for other disaster-ravaged communities has been mobilized smoothly when needed, staffed by compassionate

people who remember how good it felt to help or be helped. Our identity as a good and godly people has been cemented. This alone is a gift of immeasurable worth.

I like the words that accompany the rite of baptism in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, both for their imagery and for their meaning:

"We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit

moved over the waters and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight. Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family, and through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom. At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit. By the baptism of Jesus' death and resurrection you

set us free from the power of sin and death and raise us up to live in you."

Come a flood? Come Lord Jesus. 🌿

Lisa Swanson Faleide is a writer and founder of The Plainswoman Center for Rural Women/Rural Women's Studies. She lives on a farm near Maddock, N.D., with her husband and youngest son.

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CALENDAR NOTES

June

*compiled by Audrey Novak Riley
from sources including Evangelical
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and Seasons, and Lutheran Book
of Worship (LBW), published by
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(www.augsburgfortress.org)*

Now the church has put away its white Easter vestments and red Pentecost clothes, and we start to bring out the green paraments for the long season after Pentecost.

1 Third Sunday after Pentecost

Every Sunday this summer, the church hears from Paul's letter to the Romans. The letter deserves such a long look. Its clear exposition of the gospel that God's righteousness saves all who believe has kept it at the center of the church's life for centuries. In today's passage, Paul reminds us that even though we all fall short of the glory of God, we are justified by God's gift of grace.

Today's texts are Deuteronomy 11:18–21, 26–28; Psalm 31:1–5, 19–24; Romans 1:16–17, 3:22b–31; Matthew 7:21–29.

3 John XXIII, bishop of Rome

The bishop of Venice was elected pope at the age of 77. He was expected to be a quiet placeholder but surprised everyone by convening the Second Vatican Council to throw open the windows and let the fresh air of the modern world into the old church. The renewal of worship called for by that Council influenced the practice of many other churches as well, including our own. He died on this date in 1963.

5 Boniface, bishop of Mainz, missionary to Germany

When Boniface was about five years old, he heard the stories of some monks who

had just returned from a mission trip, and he was so impressed he vowed to follow their example when he grew up. And so he did: He went to Hesse and Bavaria and planted a vital church there. He wrote home asking for the support of the Christian Saxons in England, and they sent him a stream of money, books, supplies, and more missionaries to help spread the good news. After many years of service to the new Christians in Germany, Boniface was martyred by pagan warriors on this date in 754 as he prepared a group for confirmation on Pentecost Eve.

8 Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

In today's passage from Romans, Paul points out that God did not promise Abraham many descendants because Abraham followed the law so perfectly, but because of his faith in God and trust in God's promises. And we can follow Father Abraham's example.

Today's readings are Hosea 5:15–6:6; Psalm 50:7–15; Romans 4:13–25; Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26.

11 Barnabas, apostle

When this apostle first appears in Acts 4:36–7, we learn that he is a Jewish Christian born on the island of Cyprus, whose given name is Joseph and nickname is "son of encouragement." Throughout Acts, we see him encouraging people, welcoming believers, reconciling disputes, and spreading the gospel. In 11:22–24, we see him sent to investigate what's going on in Antioch. What does he do

when he sees Gentiles coming to the Lord? He rejoices. Today's texts are Isaiah 42:5-12; Acts 11:19-30, 13:1-3; Matthew 10:7-16.

15 Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Today's passage from Romans is short and to the point (for Paul, that is): While we still were sinners, Christ died for us.

Today's texts are Exodus 19:2-8a; Psalm 100; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8.

15 Father's Day

Thanks be to God today for fathers, grandfathers, fathers-in-law, godfathers, foster fathers, spiritual fathers, uncles, great-uncles, and big brothers too.

22 Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Paul now turns to the big question: Since God's grace and Christ's death have saved us, can we go on sinning anyway? You can almost hear the heat in Paul's answer.

Today's texts are Jeremiah 20:7-13; Psalm 69:7-18; Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-39.

24 John the Baptist

The feast of John the Baptist is unique in the church's calendar: This marks the day of his birth, not his death. The only other commemoration of a birth is, of course, Christmas. In centuries past, the church marked John's feast with

a vigil the night before; in some places this complemented old customs of bonfires and merriment far into the night. Today's texts are Malachi 3:1-4; Acts 13:13-26; Luke 1:57-80.

25 Commemoration of the Augsburg Confession

This document, whose Latin title is *Confessio Augustana*, is the first and most important of the Lutheran confessions of faith. The ELCA says in its constitution that we accept the Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the gospel (see www.elca.org/communication/faith).

It was written by Philipp Melancthon in consultation with Martin Luther and others and presented to the Holy Roman Emperor on this date in 1530. The emperor did not want it presented to the public and so convened the hearing in a small chapel. But the two who were appointed to read it aloud (in both Latin and German) read so loudly that the people outside were able to hear it clearly.

25 Philipp Melancthon, renewer of the church

Today we commemorate Martin Luther's friend and colleague, the brilliant scholar Philipp Melancthon. His intellectual calm was a perfect match for Luther's fiery passion, and together they began the Reformation. His tomb is near

Luther's in the Castle Church in Wittenberg, where both taught and preached.

29 Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Today Paul expands on what we heard from him in last week's passage from Romans. We are set free from the slavery of sin to live in obedience to God's grace, which leads us to eternal life. Alleluia, alleluia!

The readings appointed for today are Jeremiah 28:5-9; Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42.

29 Peter and Paul, apostles

Today we commemorate these two great apostles and pillars of the church. Why both on the same day? Tradition tells us they were both martyred in Rome in about the year 67 during Nero's persecution of the Christians, but the date of their deaths is not known for certain. But on this date in the year 258, what was then believed to be their remains were moved to avoid desecration during another Roman persecution.

The texts appointed for today are Acts 12:1-11; Psalm 87:1-3, 5-7; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18; John 21:15-19.



PEOPLE OF THE CLOUD

by Rod G. Boriack

can picture it as if it were
yesterday. I was being held
over a big white baptismal
font in front of the standing
congregation. Surrounding
me in a half-circle were
people dressed in dark
suits and nice dresses: my
parents, godparents, and
older sister leaning in ever
so slightly to see what was
going on. Cool water was
dribbled on my head, not
just once but three times. I
squirmed in discomfort but
my mother held me closer,
reassuring me.

The pastor's finger traced a cross on my forehead. His touch was gentle yet sure. The pastor looked up and asked something and the congregation answered. He asked another question and my parents and godparents said something, each in turn. Their "amen" is the last thing I remember before drifting off to sleep in my mother's arms. I remember it well . . .

Okay, here's my confession. You knew it was coming, right? My memory of my baptism is a work of historical fiction. It is true that I was baptized soon after my birth, and what I imagine probably bears some semblance to what actually happened at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Lodi, California, that day. My sister, parents, pastor, and godparents were gathered with me at the font. That's all true. Oh yeah, and I'm pretty sure that I was a squirmy baby.

This is also true: Try as I might, I have no memory or knowledge of who my godparents were or what our relationship has been over the years. I've lived with a vague notion of who they were, but I had to ask my mother to provide the facts and dispel any visions of my own making. She was embarrassed to admit that her memories were a little vague too, but together we figured out who stood with me as my godparents.

My godparents were the aunt and uncle I had imagined all those years. Were they poor godparents because

I couldn't remember with vivid certainty that they were my godparents? Quite the contrary—they were both among the cloud of witnesses of loving and faith-filled adults who surrounded me from birth and baptism into adulthood. And now I find myself among the cloud of the faithful surrounding six children of God, ages two through 30-something. I am godparent to six by their parents' invitation, and godparent to a host of others by virtue of what is asked of me as part of the larger gathered community of faith—people of the cloud (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Cloud of witnesses

People of the cloud. That's the image I see when I read the letter to the Hebrews. That letter's writer encouraged and strengthened the early Christians by reminding them of the people of faith who came before them and who served as their foundation and example. The prophets and leaders of the Old Testament were as a cloud stretching across history in preparation for the reality of a new life made possible by Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. And if that wasn't enough, the writer reminded those who read the letter not to forget each other in the present. They, too, were now part of the cloud of witnesses surrounding each other.

I'm still learning what all of this means. My godchildren have been

shaping my faith and teaching me things about life that I hadn't anticipated. They are a cloud of witnesses surrounding me. It's funny how that works. One moment you think you are the teacher, mentor, role model, passer of faith, and rabbi, and the next you discover that you are the

**Know that you are among
the cloud of witnesses
that God has called to
strengthen and sustain
the faith and lives of
others.**

student, learner, receiver, and seeker. And back and forth it goes. This is the marvelous and surprising reality of being the Body of Christ, the community of all believers, children of God, the church.

Ashley's wedding

On a chilly morning in the Columbia River Gorge of Oregon, a crowd of people gathered outdoors in preparation for my goddaughter Ashley's wedding. We poured oil into tiki torches, we set tables, arranged flowers, greeted the slow and steady trickle of people coming to celebrate, completed tasks, and volunteered for more. Mostly we

filled the air with laughter and talk among friends, family, and strangers. When it came time for the wedding ceremony to begin, we walked along the edge of a lake and joined the bride and groom in a grassy clearing on the shore. There we gathered, young and old, standing and sitting, some in suits and dresses, some barefooted, some tattooed, carrying sleeping babies, keeping an eye on wandering children. This was an occasion for my goddaughter to remind her godfather of what the kingdom of God must look like, what healing joy there is in love, and how good it feels to gather as the children of God with all our beauty and imperfections.

Steven's game

Steven, my nephew and godson, dabbled in sports and all kinds of things in high school. Football was one of those endeavors that surprised us all. His lumbering stature, clumsy feet, and gentle spirit didn't match up with what most of us envisioned as necessary for doing battle on the field, escaping tackles, or flying through the air to catch a touchdown pass. But if he was going to venture into playing football, the least I could do was to fly out to California for a game and cheer him on with the rest of the family. Besides, I was curious. So I got to a game, cheered for Steven's team, and cheered extra loud dur-

ing the last two minutes when he was finally sent out onto the field to play. I don't know how Steven felt after that game, but I was inspired by his taking the risk to do something unfamiliar and difficult. It was a demonstration of simple boldness that can only come from some measure of faith and trust that God is with us when we run and when we fall.

Witness to the gift

My wife and I now give thanks for Oliver, the most recent godchild to enter our lives. He's only two years old, but he's already a blessing and a teacher, as are all the other godchildren that surround us. Oliver, though quiet and calm, already knows how to make me laugh. That's a great gift to me in itself. Who knows what he will teach us in the years to come?

When I think about it, this all sounds a little simplistic. Football games, weddings, filling tiki torches, chaperoning an all-night party, praying for a young man in seminary, the gift of a baptismal candle, smiles, and hugs. What does any of this have to do with nurturing a young person in the faith and walking with him or her throughout life? Everything, I suspect.

Sometimes I have to let go of the big dream of steering a child into becoming an adult who is an exemplary Christian, a member of

a Lutheran congregation, and who can recite the books of the Bible and the Ten Commandments—in correct order. I have to remind myself to let go of wanting to be the kind of godparent that other people will want to write books about. These desires tend to distract me from being present and attentive in another person's life.

What I am led to embrace and follow is the nudging of the Spirit to give each day as a simple, obedient servant of Christ and to accept that one of the most significant things I can do as a godparent is to simply witness the gift of God's love, forgiveness, and healing in an imperfect, broken world. No greater gift can another person—child or adult—know in his or her life, even if it is received in the simplest of words, actions, prayers, or relationship.

The small stuff counts. It's more meaningful than we imagine.

Work in progress

Godparenting really is work. We are created for it and called to it. Nowhere in Scripture will you find any admonition to stand alone in life or that we only have value if we can tough it out on our own. So in that spirit of mutual love and support, I offer some of the simple lessons I've learned along the way as a godparent:

> **It's never too late** to reconnect in a relationship with your god-

child, no matter how awkward or difficult it may seem. Start in a simple way.

> **Speak of your faith** openly, not as if you are teaching nuggets of lifesaving wisdom to someone but as a child of God who knows hope, love, imperfection, and forgiveness in your own life and can't keep it to yourself.

> **Listen carefully** for your godchild's questions and wondering. Don't be afraid to wonder with him or her. Don't be afraid to speak from your own faith journey.

> **Remember and celebrate** the milestones throughout your godchild's life: birthdays, baptismal anniversaries, graduations, marriages, births, accomplishments, holidays, passing an important test, and whatever seems significant in his or her life.

> **Make your presence and support known** when life is challenging: the death of a loved one, separation or divorce, illness, hard times at school or work, times of doubt, unemployment, turmoil in a relationship. Knowing that one is not alone in dark or tough times is to know God's tender, persistent presence.

> **Figure out ways to stay in touch** that are easy to initiate and sustain over time: a phone call, greeting card, e-card, post card, e-mail, text message, letter, instant message, or personal visit.

> **Pray, pray, and pray.** Whenever a thought of your godchild pops into your head, pause and pray for your godchild and his or her family.

I know I'll continue to learn from those who surround me. Godparenting will always be a work in progress.

If you get to the end of this and think to yourself "but I've never been asked to be a godparent" or "maybe I'll never be a godparent," fear not. The simple truth is that you can live as a godparent with the people in your life right now, without ever being asked.

Maybe some day we'll reconsider our terminology and think of ourselves more as *godcompanions*. After all, it's not just about babies and baptism—it's really about how we behave together as people of God throughout life.

Know that you are among the cloud of witnesses that God has called to strengthen and sustain the faith and lives of others. You are among the cloud of witnesses that surrounds every living thing, stranger and friend alike, with the good news of new life and healing through Jesus Christ. No further invitation is needed. We are all people of the cloud. ☙

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HEALTH WISE

The Price of Perfection

by Molly M. Ginty

Every spring, Cassie

Hoeprich watched the ritual begin.

"Around this time of year, the girls in my school would start freaking out, running to the gym and going on diets because they wanted the 'perfect' beach body," says Hoeprich, 18.

Girls would starve themselves into slimness, subsisting on celery and making endless laps around the track. In secret, many would binge on high-calorie sweets and snacks, desperate to ease their gnawing hunger or to fill a perceived emptiness inside. Hoeprich responded by launching an annual "Love Your Body" day and founding Body Aloud, a student-run size-acceptance organization at her San Diego high school.

According to health advocates, both undereating and overeating are fueled by negative body image—a problem so pervasive that a Dole Nutrition Institute poll found that 40 percent of young women would sacrifice a year of their lives if it would guarantee they would remain thin for life. "From magazines that peddle fad diets to ads that feature razor-thin models, our culture teaches girls and women to hate their bodies, no matter whether they're heavy or thin," says Connie Sobczak, co-founder of The Body Positive, a Berkeley, California, non-profit organization that promotes healthy living. "But by giving girls positive messages and helping them establish healthy patterns, we can teach them to love their bodies despite this negativism."

How do you know that a girl needs help? One sign may be that she's over-

eating. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a record 19 percent of children ages 6 to 11 are overweight, as are a record 17 percent of adolescents ages 12 to 19. Being overweight can boost a girl's risk of asthma, breast cancer, diabetes, heart disease, infertility, and osteoarthritis—and ravage her confidence and self-esteem.

Equally hazardous? Extreme dieting. Weight loss pills, taken by 13 percent of high school girls, can cause anxiety, gas, oily leakage, and poor vitamin absorption. Eating disorders, affecting 1 to 3 percent of girls, can lead to malnutrition, stomach rupture, tooth erosion, and heart, liver, and kidney damage. In 6 percent of cases, reports the American Journal of Psychiatry, anorexia (self-starvation) can lead to premature death.

Patterns of undereating and overeating are not easy to break. Research from the University of Pennsylvania shows that commercial diets don't work, and a study in the medical journal *Lancet* shows that most girls who undergo intensive treatment for eating disorders never achieve full recovery.

Since addressing these problems after they start isn't always effective, health advocates say that we must work to counter negative body image in girls as early as possible so that they stay healthy through adulthood. According to the *Journal of Pediatrics*, overweight pre-teens are 11 to 30 more times more likely than their peers to be obese when they are older. And according to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Eating

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

Disorders, 86 percent of eating disorders develop before age 20.

How can you help girls become body-positive? Here are experts' top tips: **Know the parameters** of healthy weight, defined as a measurement of body mass—Body Mass Index or BMI. “Even better standards are the ‘healthy at any size’ paradigm or ‘metabolic fitness,’ in which you have healthy blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels, regardless of your size,” says Sobczak.

During family meals, steer clear of super-sized, sugary, starchy, convenience foods. Follow government guidelines so that everyone gets five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables (along with 30 to 90 minutes of moderate exercise) per day.

Encourage young women to practice “attuned eating” by enjoying food when they’re hungry and stopping when they’re full. Allow girls to eat all the healthy food they want, trusting that their bodies will tell them when they’re satiated.

Watch not only what your teen eats, but what she reads. A University of Minnesota study shows that reading weight-loss articles makes a girl three times more likely to engage in dieting practices such as vomiting and taking laxatives.

Show appreciation and respect for diversity, reminding young women how beautiful people are in all their varied shapes, colors, and sizes.

Lobby schools to serve fresh, healthy food in cafeterias; to offer more recess and physical education; and to start body acceptance initiatives like BodyImageHealth.org, TheBodyPositive.org,

and Full of Ourselves (www.mclean.harvard.edu/education/youth).

Slow down and breathe deep. “In many American families today, kids are on the run, parents are juggling two jobs, and people are grabbing food on the go,” says Madelyn Fernstrom, director of the University of Pittsburgh’s Weight Management Center. “People are stressed and overeating for relaxation when they need to find it in other ways.”

Avoid using food either as a reward or as a punishment.

Encourage girls to speak openly and think critically—especially about body image issues.

Watch for signs of eating disorders: irritability, skipping meals, excessive exercising, obsessive calorie counting, anxiety about clothes shopping, withdrawal from social activities, and complaints that the girl—or others—are too fat. “Note that if a girl is bulimic and bingeing and vomiting, she may not lose weight, but will instead use the bathroom frequently,” says Lynn Grefe, CEO of the National Eating Disorders Association.

Watch your own eating attitudes and behaviors. Do you complain about your weight? Talk constantly of dieting? Pay for a brownie with a trip to the gym? Young women around you are absorbing these messages. The message to you is to celebrate your body, loving yourself—and the girls in your life—no matter what shape you’re in. 🌸

Molly M. Ginty lives in New York City. Her work has appeared in *Ms.*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Women’s eNews*.

For more information

If you think you or your loved one may

have an eating disorder, visit www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

or www.bingeandpurge.org

National Institute of Mental Health

(NIMH) website

To find out your Body Mass Index go to

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi



CHRIST'S BODY IN THE WORLD

by Julie K. Ageson

O God, be our God,
containing the seas,
pouring water into a basin,
washing us yet again.
Make us into us,
your body in the world,
our feet washed,
ready to serve.

The Bible is filled with “water stories.” We know many of them by heart—Noah and the flood, the Israelites and the crossing of the Red Sea, Jonah in the belly of the whale, Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee. These and many other water stories are baptism stories. When we stop to think about their many layered meanings, we begin to recognize them as life-saving, life-giving baptismal stories through which we glimpse God’s relentless love for us and for all creation. These water stories are stories of deliverance from death into life. They are about being the body of Christ in the world, “making us into us.”

Several years ago in my parish community, we began an effort to celebrate baptism and the water stories more intentionally. We knew intuitively that baptism is a very big deal and we wanted to make the scriptural connections rich and meaningful. We also knew that at every baptismal celebration, we as a congregation make promises to support new sisters and brothers in Christ, to confess with them the faith of the church, and to welcome them into the body of Christ. As Lutherans, we wanted to embrace more fully what it means to be word and sacrament Christians, to live deeply into what it is to celebrate the means of grace.

Baptism was at the heart of our desire to experience God’s saving acts and to know the grace and love of God in Christ. How could we help one another celebrate the life-giving promises of baptism? What might we do to remind each other of our daily dying and rising with Christ? How would we fulfill our promises to support the newly baptized and pray for them in their new life in Christ? What would help us make a very big deal of the life-giving waters of baptism? What might it mean to be Christ’s body in the world? How could we celebrate “making us into us”?

We began to look for ways to see and interpret baptism and the life-giving waters conveyed in this sacrament more intentionally. After inviting everyone in the parish to share the date of their baptism, our pastor and staff began a custom of sending cards and a baptismal reflection to every member of the congregation on the anniversary of their baptism. On the first Sunday of every month, the names of those baptized in that month were read at the close of worship, inviting prayers for each person. In the parish newsletter, we began noting the baptismal birthdays of all our young people.

Special attention was given to the water stories and water imagery in the Bible. When a baptism was celebrated during Sunday worship, the assembly stood and turned to look toward the place of baptism at the entrance. Children were invited to gather in the balcony above the font for a bird's-eye view of the momentous occasion. Family members and friends gathered in a large circle around the one being baptized. In a gesture meant to convey the power of water and word, the pastor and an assistant began the baptismal liturgy by pouring water from high above the font so that all might hear the sound of running water filling the basin as the prayer was proclaimed: "God, who is rich in mercy and love, gives us a new birth into a living hope through the sacrament of baptism. By water and the word, God delivers us from sin and death and raises us to new life in Jesus."

Making large and generous signs and symbols of cross and water and word helped us visualize being named, chosen, and marked with God's love. Baptismal candles were lit, reminding parents and godparents to celebrate future baptismal birthdays.

As we sought to think more intentionally about our own baptismal promises, it became clear that the place of baptism needed to be at the entrance to our sanctuary, central and visible to all who enter and leave this place of worship. Knowing that baptism both symbolizes and brings about our entry into the body of Christ, we wanted the baptismal font, filled with water, to be invitational and welcoming as worshipers entered the sanctuary. We wanted the place of baptism to be wide and embracing. We wanted to pass by it each week on our way to the Eucharist so that we might remember the sign and the touch of water and cross, making the mark of the cross on our foreheads. In this way, we began some habits that have continued to shape and send us into the world marked forever with the cross of Christ traced on our heads at baptism.

We are dripping wet,
O God,
and nothing in our overloaded closets will do.
Give us your own clothing.
Clothe us, your body in the world,
with your mercy.

On the Sunday of the Baptism of Our Lord in January, we dedicated a hammered copper sculpture suspended above the font, a sign of God's spirit and the life-giving waters that flow from that font. It was a gift from a member whose life and death were marked in this congregation and remembered in a symbol that continues to mark us all. Then in February, Ash Wednesday arrived. At the beginning of the service, we all found our

Your womb waters,
O mother God,
gave life to us all.
Now wash off our bodies
the blood of your Son,
and nurse us, we beg you,
when we wail.

way to the front of the sanctuary for the imposition of ashes, a gesture rooted in our baptism. "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." Toward the close of the service, preparing now for Holy Communion, we all went again to the font on our way to the table, dipping our fingers into baptismal water—water that now washes away that smudgy cross of ash with a watery cross—from death into life.

At the close of the Ash Wednesday service in a ritual marking the beginning of Lent, the baptismal water in the font was replaced with sand and rocks. Pouring the dry and dusty mixture into the font, we are reminded of Lent's call to remember our mortality, a parched path of brokenness and hungering after God, and the new life and promise of resurrection that is Easter—"making us into us." At an Easter Vigil one year, I remember the laughter of a young child as baptismal water splashed her head and face initiating her into this new life and into the "us" that is the body of Christ.

We continue to gather around the font for remembrances of baptism, for the Easter season readings, and whenever else we need reassuring

BAPTISMAL RESOURCES

Christening: A Guide for Parents
by Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *God's
Spirit in My Water: Baptism
and the Power of the Holy Spirit*
(Augsburg Fortress, 1996)

Water, Come Over Me
around the font and the font
the font, the font, the font
(Wipf and Stock, 2004)

Baptism: Sacrament of Initiation
is a time to
for the young
the font, the font, the font
of the font, the font, the font

Water, Come Over Me
young Mexican boy orphaned by a
the font, the font, the font
the font, the font, the font
(Augsburg Fortress, 1996)

Water, Come Over Me
Water, Come Over Me
the font, the font, the font
the font, the font, the font
(Augsburg Fortress, 1996)

Water, Come Over Me
the font, the font, the font
the font, the font, the font
the font, the font, the font
(Augsburg Fortress, 1996)

images of life-giving water. We stop there every Sunday on the way to Holy Communion and again when we enter and leave the sanctuary. One of our children was so certain that a baptismal cross had been etched into his forehead that he looked for it in the mirror at home, demanding of his mother, "Where's my cross?" Parents carrying very young children to the communion table often mark their child with the cross before making the sign on their own brow.

In these ways, we seek to honor the promises we make each time someone is baptized. We tell the stories. We bring one another to worship and to the table of the Lord. We celebrate milestones, marking our journeys of faith in ritual actions. We teach the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the commandments. Appropriate Bibles are presented at different stages of development and understanding. We pray for one another, for all God's people, and for all creation. And we work for justice and peace, sharing the overwhelming love and mercy of our gracious God.

Making a very big deal of baptism reminds us of rebirth and entry into the community of faith, both our own parish and the whole Christian church on earth. Baptism clothes us with new life, hope, and the promises of resurrection, making us into Christ's body in the world, making us into us. Thanks be to God. 🌿

Julie K. Ageson is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minn.

O unspeakable God,
we cannot say all your providence,
but only trace a cross instead.
May it be our spar,
catching your Spirit
and triumphing over the sea monsters,
enabling our journey toward you.

The poetic text is quoted by permission from *Words around the Font* by Gail Ramshaw. Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004.

Called by Name: Celebrating Baptism Today (Augsburg Fortress, 2002).

Baptism Sourcebook contains a stunning collection of readings, poetry, and reflections on themes of baptism, faith, and more (Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

Elizabeth Caldwell's beautiful book, *Come with Me: Rethinking the Sacraments for Children* invites children to explore the sacraments (Pilgrim Press, 1996).

The ELCA's Mosaic video magazine provides an overview of baptism in *Baptism: More than a Ceremony*, a 30-minute program in three segments: "Baptism: More than a Ceremony"; "Baptism: Promises Made, Promises Kept"; and "Baptism: A Talk with the Experts" (ELCA, 2002).

"Come Right In—You're Home," *God Says to Us When We Are Baptized* is a collection of reflections written by Marie Sundet and illustrated by children for children (Marie Sundet, 1996).

Called by Name: Celebrating Baptism Today is another video rich in baptismal images and short stories juxtaposed with scenes from the Easter Vigil baptismal ceremony (St. Anthony Messenger Press).

Let the Children Come: A Baptism Manual for Parents and Sponsors continues to be an important resource for helping families prepare for baptism (Daniel Erlander, 1996. Available from Augsburg Fortress).

CONSOLATIONS OF BAPTISM

by Martha E. Stortz

Baptism is an *event*. We produce certificates stating date and place and presiding pastor. Most Christians regard baptism as a one-time-only event, celebrated the way one observes births. You're born once; you're baptized once.

Baptism lies somewhere in the distant past. It's over and done with; it's been taken care of.

But baptism is also a *practice*. Baptism is ongoing, and Christians return to it again and again to soak in its blessings. The past cannot contain baptism the way it contains many other events. We don't dry off, put the baptismal gown that Grandma Carlson wore back into mothballs, and march off on the journey of discipleship. As a practice, baptism offers a map for the road ahead. In his *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther speaks again and again of baptism as something to which we return daily: "Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, once begun and ever continued"

(The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1959).

Returning daily to baptism helps leave the old behind; it invites us into new life. Lucas Cranach the Elder, a German Reformation artist, depicted this daily return to the new life of baptism in his 1546 painting, "The Fountain of Youth." He painted people who were old and bent entering a large pool of water on one side and emerging young and joyous on the other. In the days before Botox and plastic surgery, explorers like Juan Ponce de Leon crossed the ocean to seek magical youth-giving waters in the swamps of Florida. But Martin Luther believed he'd found



those life-renewing waters in baptism. They erased the “old Adam,” wrinkled with sin, and left in its place a “new Adam,” ready for new possibilities.

Yet Luther knew there would be obstacles along the way. As a daily practice, baptism offers us three much-needed consolations: a reminder of who and whose we really are, compassion and the invitation to be Christ’s hands in the world, and direction for the journey ahead. These consolations of baptism give the grace we need in good times—and especially in bad.

IDENTITY

A young mother extricated herself from an abusive marriage. She had two children, a punishing ex-husband, and something she hadn’t expected: an identity crisis. “Who were we? I had to redefine our family unit.” A strong faith and a loving congregation helped. Over and over again, she found herself telling her children, and herself: “We’re Children of God. We’re Children of God. We’re in the family of the Children of God.” It’s become the refrain of their daily life. Sometimes she wiped away tears as she spoke it; sometimes she wiped down the counter. But the

words stuck. Now whenever she says it, her young daughter chimes in along with her.

This young mother and her children fall back on the blessings of baptism. As an ongoing practice, baptism gives us an identity and a set of relationships we will need for the journey of discipleship. Many Christians regard the most important identity given in baptism as the bestowal of a family name. In some magical sense, it seems that the infant is not “completely” a Carlson or Diaz until it is called by its full name in baptism: Ruth Marie Carl-

son or Guillermo Bautista Diaz. But this could not be further from the truth. The most important name given in baptism is Child of God, as the family of the children of God acknowledges one of its own.

Claiming the name Child of God establishes certain relationships. Baptism introduces us to our traveling companions along the

THE PRACTICE OF BAPTISM IS A LOT LIKE LEARNING TO DIVE.

journey of discipleship. We meet Jesus as our Brother and assume the same identity he took on in his own baptism when the heavens opened and a voice declared: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). We meet God as Father; we are received into a new relationship with the divine.

We meet a family of brothers and sisters in Christ who welcome us into a whole new relationship with the world. We’ll need this name and these relationships for the road ahead.

Baptism seals this identity by marking us. As we receive the name Child of God, we are marked by the sign of the cross. This mark identifies us to others—and to ourselves. Consider the culture of tattoos and body-piercings. I used to write off these markings as youthful indiscre-

tions, but now I’m not so sure. The people who sport these piercings have witnessed the erosion of such mediating institutions as family and church and government with a cynicism born of despair. Perhaps their piercings and tattoos stake claim to their own bodies, which they hold onto as the last remaining “still point of a turning world,” as the poet

T.S. Eliot put it. Christians should understand the need to be marked.

Baptism marks us, signing us, sealing us, and claiming us for the One who loves us. We are marked women and men.

This identity anchors us in seas of change when other identities become unmoored. Marriages dissolve in divorce or death; we can no longer count on being *wife*. Jobs change; we can no longer count on being *teacher* or *nurse* or *lawyer*. But there’s always room in God’s family; we can always count on being *Child of God*. That identity never alters. It tells us *who* we are even as it tells us *whose* we are. For God says to each of us: “You are my child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

COMPASSION

“Easy for you to say!” The woman closed the magazine and tried to sort through conflicting feelings of anger and sadness and fear. She’d been reading about baptism, but the topic was deeply per-

sonal. More than 40 years ago she’d buried an infant son—without the sacrament. Things had started going wrong the minute he was born. The family had called their pastor and the hospital chaplain, but they came too late. Now, when she visited his grave, she wondered what he would have looked like as an adult. She tried to imagine his children—her grandchildren. But mostly she wondered where he was. What happens to people who die without baptism?

The question is a powerful one, appropriate to our Lutheran tradition that stakes so much on baptism. What happens to people who didn’t get the sacrament? Fortunately Martin Luther himself confronted this question as he responded to an anguished request from a woman who’d lost her infant in childbirth. Because he died without baptism, was the child consigned to the fires of hell? Graphic medieval depictions of fire and brimstone fed her anguish.

Luther responded with pastoral compassion and theological depth. God shared her sorrow, he wrote, and the child was baptized by the tears of his parents.

Lutheran theology emphasizes the faith of the community in the sacrament. At two, four, eight months, a year, an infant has no idea what’s going on in the rite. Rather, the community blesses and promises, pledging to nurture the

child in faith. If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a congregation to raise a Christian. The youngest children of God rest on the faith of the family.

What if we could extend this faith to all the children of God, claimed and unclaimed, baptized and unbaptized? Resting on the faith of the family, Christians should say that we are *all* children of God, whether Muslim or Jew, unbeliever or agnostic. Christians simply acknowledge *who* and *whose* we are. Baptism is a great way to say “Yes!” to that belonging, claiming the One who has already claimed us.

We who have been baptized have a particular responsibility to the rest of God’s children. We live out our baptism by loving them, reconciling with them, leading them by example to the One “in whom we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Finally, as the body of Christ in the world, we are that body that people long to touch. God doesn’t expect us latter-day disciples to do any better than the apostle Thomas. He needed visible, touchable proof that he was in the presence of God’s Son. As Christ’s body in the world, we are that proof.

DIRECTION

During high school, I tried a difficult dive off a three-meter board. My coach had been clear about what to do and

when to do it, but there was just a lot to keep track of. I would get to the end of the board and freeze. I forgot what I needed to do to go forward. By then, of course, I’d lost the momentum for the dive. I had to start all over again. Each time I had a little more information from the coach, a little more encouragement from my teammates, and a clearer picture of what happened next. But the only way I was going to get off that board was by starting all over again.

The practice of baptism is a lot like learning to dive. It feels like it runs in circles, and we move forward only by beginning all over again. We return again and again to the name we received in baptism: Child of God. We move forward only by returning to baptism’s blessing: “This is my child, the Beloved.” Returning to that name and that blessing orients us to the journey ahead just like a run down a three-meter board orients a diver to the jack-knife ahead. The call that baptism issues is a simple invitation: “Follow me.”

“Follow me.” Jesus beckoned his first disciples with the same words, and the invitation was so compelling, they didn’t ask for travel insurance first. Along the way, however, disciples faltered and fell out of step. They longed for the lives they had left behind, even the monotony of fishing. They missed their friends and family; they worried about Jesus’ strange ways and odd taste

in friends. Mostly they were afraid of what the journey would bring. Again and again, Jesus re-issued the invitation: “Follow me.” These words bookend the life of discipleship. If we take Peter’s story seriously, these words begin (Mark 1:16–20) and end (John 21:22) the journey. The only thing Jesus says as frequently are the words: “Be not afraid.” That’s no coincidence.

The journey of discipleship is perilous. As was the case with medieval pilgrims, the journey might entail suffering, persecution, and even death. Pilgrim’s garb marked these travelers as easy prey. As we have seen, baptism makes us marked women and men, targets for everything and everyone held in thrall by evil. Yet, while baptism makes us more visible, it also gives us the power to stand up to evil. Baptized into the death of Jesus, we rest assured that we are also baptized into his resurrection (Romans 6:4). The confrontation with powers and principalities will end, not at the cross, but with Pentecost, the descent of the Spirit of the Risen Christ.

Let us hold fast to the consolations of baptism and move into the future with hope, a light step, and a steady heart. 🌿

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Introduction to Summer Bible Study

by Karen G. Bockelman

wa-ter (wôt' r, wät'-) n. [OE wæter] **1** *the colorless, transparent liquid occurring on earth as rivers, lakes, oceans, etc., and falling from the clouds as rain: chemically a compound of hydrogen and oxygen, H₂O.*

Dictionaries have their place—to provide straightforward definitions of our basic vocabulary. But to define water in terms of a chemical compound or a liquid found in certain forms isn't very inspiring. It's so ordinary that we take it for granted.

bap-tism (bap'tiz' m) n. [< Gr baptizein] **1** *the ceremony or sacrament of admitting a person into Christianity or a specific Christian church by immersing the individual in water or by pouring or sprinkling water on the individual.*

The dictionary definition of baptism is not much better. Oh, there are a few more evocative words—sacrament, immersing, pouring, sprinkling—but it still sounds pretty ordinary, like joining a club. Baptism, too, can be taken for granted, especially by those who have grown up in the church.

Although the dictionary gives multiple meanings of a word, the sense of layered meanings, of poetic imagination, is lost. Richness is overshadowed by the commonplace.

come (kum) vi. [< OE cumen] **1** *to move from a place thought of as "there" to or into a place thought of as "here."*

Now that's a more evocative definition! This summer Bible study is an invitation to move from the "there" of ordinary water and customary baptism to the "here" of exploring their many layers of meaning.

Water and baptism are bound together not only in the use of water for the rite, but in powerful images of birth and death, renewal and cleansing. Our study will draw on Scripture, the baptismal service, Martin Luther, the ELCA's statement on sacramental practices, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, as well as the experience and insights of study participants.

Session 1: Water, Water Everywhere

In this session we will focus on the richness of water imagery in the Bible. For a desert people, water meant life and was a miraculous sign of God's goodness. From the beginning of creation through the new Jerusalem in Revelation, water signs and narratives are a constant presence in Scripture.

Session 2: It's a Matter of Death and Life

This session will have Holy Baptism as its primary focus. We are reminded that in baptism God brings us out of death into life, by joining us to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Session 3: Living Water, Walking Wet

Here we will focus on what it means to live a baptismal life. Although a person is baptized once, the gift of baptism continues throughout a Christian's life. This is our primary vocation, our calling, lived out in the world.

So, come to the waters. Explore the riches of the Bible. Deepen your understanding of baptism. Consider your calling. And prepare to get wet!



COME TO THE WATERS SESSION 1

Water, Water Everywhere

by Karen G. Bockelman

BIBLE STUDY

Hymn

“Crashing Waters at Creation,”
Evangelical Lutheran Worship 455

Crashing waters at creation,
ordered by the Spirit’s breath,
first to witness day’s beginning
from the brightness of night’s death.

Parting water stood and trembled
as the captives passed on through,
washing off the chains of bondage—
channel to a life made new.

Cleansing water once at Jordan
closed around the one foretold,
opened to reveal the glory
ever new and ever old.

Living water, never ending,
quench the thirst and flood the soul.
Wellspring, source of life eternal,
drench our dryness, make us whole.

Text: Sylvia G. Dunstan, 1955–1993

Text © 1991 GIA Publications, Inc.

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Opening Prayer

The leader addresses the group.

*Joined to Christ in baptism, let us come to the waters and give thanks
for this gift.*

Water may be poured into a bowl as the leader alone or the group
together gives thanks.

*We give you thanks, O God,
for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters
and by your Word you created the world,
calling forth life in which you took delight.*

*Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family.
Through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom.
At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with
the Holy Spirit.*

*By water and your Word you claim us as daughters and sons,
making us heirs of your promise and servants of all.
We praise you for the gift of water that sustains life,
and above all we praise you for the gift of new life in Jesus Christ.
Shower us with your Spirit,
and renew our lives with your forgiveness, grace and love.
To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.*

Amen.

adapted from Thanksgiving for Baptism

Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 97

Generous Water

Throughout my years as a parish pastor, I delighted in baptisms. I began my ministry using *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)* and came to cherish its baptismal service, especially the prayer of thanksgiving over the water. This prayer was new to many Lutherans then, but it reflected a practice of both the early church and Martin Luther. In fact, the *LBW* prayer was an adaptation of the “Flood Prayer” Luther included in his 1523 Order of Baptism. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* continues the use of a prayer of thanksgiving at the font.

In this prayer, God’s saving deeds are remembered, especially those saving acts that are connected with water, emphasizing the baptismal connection of water and word. Not surprisingly, the increase in water language led to an increased use of water—even the practice of baptizing by immersion! It became my own practice, during this prayer, to pour the water from a pitcher into the font or bowl. Holding the pitcher high and pouring slowly, I wanted everyone to see and hear (and for those nearby, even feel) the water. The baptism pages of my *LBW* became permanently wrinkled and water-spotted.

I still remember clearly the definition of a sacrament that I learned in confirmation class: A sacrament is a holy act instituted by Christ in which by visible means God gives and seals invisible grace. Water is the visible means of baptism. The reality of water, seen and heard and felt, leaves no doubt that God’s promise of forgiveness of sin, deliverance from death, and everlasting salvation is real and meant for you and me. These gifts, along with new birth, adoption as God’s children, and membership in the body of Christ—these gifts are what our gracious and generous God gives us. What better way to illustrate God’s generosity than through the generous use of water?

Sharing

- The hymn and prayer suggested for the opening of this session draw on biblical images and stories of water, deepening our understanding of both Scripture and baptism.
- Look again at these texts and circle every instance of the word “water.” How many are there? What other watery words do you find?

Water Everywhere

Water is all around us and within us. Roughly 70 percent of an adult’s body is water. Somewhere between 70 and 75 percent of the earth’s surface is covered with water. For most of us, water is available with the turn of a tap or the push of a button. We have water in tubs, pools, shower stalls, sprinklers, irrigation systems, car washes, washing machines, rivers, streams, lakes, oceans, and birdbaths. We have water to drink, wash in, play in, nurture animals and plants with, transport cargo on, and enjoy. In the United States, the average person uses 80 to 100 gallons of water per day.

Water is all around and within the Bible, too. From the watery chaos before the Creation, through the Flood and the Exodus, to Jesus’ own baptism at the Jordan, these particular biblical water stories have long been understood to be “types,” or foreshadowings, of baptism. Let’s take a closer look at each of them.

The Creation

READ GENESIS 1:1–10, 2:5–9.

Water plays a significant role in the creation narratives. Ancient peoples believed the world originated from and was founded upon a watery abyss, the “deep.” Just as human beings begin in the waters of the womb, the earth itself is born out of the waters of the deep. Job 38:8–11 describes the Creation in terms of the sea bursting out from the womb.

Genesis 1 begins with a portrayal of this uncreated watery chaos—the earth as a formless void, covered by

darkness, swept by the Spirit of God. All life comes from water. On the second day, God separates the waters from the waters. The sky, like a great dome, walls off the waters of chaos above. On the third day, the waters below are gathered together into seas and dry land appears.

The creation narrative of Genesis 2 also begins with water—a stream rising from the earth and watering the ground, even before the creation of the Garden of Eden.

At the end of the Bible, creation comes full circle with a new heaven and a new earth. The sea is no more (Revelation 21:1) and the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flows from the throne of God (22:1).

Sharing

- How do you think the waters of the Creation are linked to the waters of baptism? What themes do you find in common?

The Flood

READ GENESIS 6:11–22, 7:11–18, 8:6–18.

The Flood is a story of creation and cleansing. The earth has become corrupt because of the wickedness of humankind. In judgment, God causes all the fountains of the deep to burst forth and the windows of the heavens to open. It is a near return to chaos. Water once again covers everything, washing away corruption.

But Noah, a righteous man, had found favor in God's sight. God commanded him to build an ark so that he, his family, and representative animals could ride out the flood. Early Christians explicitly spoke of Noah and his family being saved through water (1 Peter 3:20–21) and of this act prefiguring baptism.

Sharing

- What relationship do you see between the waters of the Flood and the waters of baptism? What themes do you find in common here?

The Exodus

READ EXODUS 14:10–31.

The story of Israel's deliverance from slavery into freedom is told as an escape across the Red Sea. Biblical scholars have long debated the geography of the crossing and what kind of natural phenomenon may have made it possible. We may be more likely to see this event in the movie images of *The Ten Commandments* or *The Prince of Egypt*.

What is clear is that once again salvation and new life come from passing through water. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of this event as a baptism (1 Corinthians 10:1–4).

Sharing

- What relationship do you see between Israel's crossing the sea and baptism? What themes do you find in common?

Jesus' Baptism

READ MATTHEW 3:13–17.

Like John the Baptist, there are those who wonder that Jesus came to be baptized. He certainly didn't need baptism for the forgiveness of his sins. But by coming to John, Jesus identifies with all those who responded to the Baptist's call for repentance. In baptism, Jesus begins his ministry by passing through the water.

In baptism, we stand with Jesus in the Jordan River. We, too, feel the water and hear the word, God's voice naming us beloved children. For Apostle Paul and for Martin Luther, when we are baptized, we are united with Christ. We share in Christ's death and in his resurrection (Romans 6:3–4).

Sharing

- What connections between Jesus' baptism and your own baptism are meaningful for you?

Lots of Water

You may be feeling a bit over your head in all this water, but we've barely gotten a sprinkling. Once you start looking for it, the Bible is soaking wet! There are still and stormy waters, fountains of living water and wells of salvation, thirst for living water and streams in the desert, human groanings are poured out like water, but love cannot be quenched by many waters, the wise are like trees planted by streams of water, justice and righteousness roll down like the waters of an everlasting stream.

In addition to these poetic watery metaphors, there are many well-known, even beloved, stories that happen around water. Hagar is saved from death by the appearance of a well, Moses is drawn up out of the water. God delivers water from a rock in the wilderness. Naaman's leprosy is healed by washing in the water of the Jordan River. Jonah is saved from drowning in the water of the sea. Jesus changes water into wine and washes his disciples' feet with water.

Sharing

- > *What other Bible passages or stories do you recall or can you find that feature water?*

Water Notes

Over the years my daughter has become something of a collector of quotations—inspirational, funny, thought-provoking, challenging. She has posted them on her bulletin board and covered the walls of her room. I'm always on the lookout for new quotations to send her, just to let her know I'm thinking of her. People who

keep scrapbooks or journals often look for an apt quotation or image to capture an idea.

As you have explored these biblical images of water, you may have discovered or rediscovered verses or phrases of support, encouragement, strength, and joy. If a verse or thought is meaningful to you, it may be worth saving or sharing with others.

Consider


- Compiling a personal collection of biblical water verses, with supporting images, photos, poetry, prayers, or meditations
- Putting together a group devotional for your congregation or women's organization, perhaps for next Lent
- Developing notecards that can be used to mark baptisms and baptismal anniversaries

Closing

Turn your attention once again to the bowl of water in your midst. Offer prayers of thanksgiving for God's gift of water and for the water stories and experiences shared in this time together. Ask for God's healing presence with any who have need. Ask for God's blessing on any future activities and for the daily lives of those who have participated.

If you wish, sing or read aloud the opening hymn again. 🌸

The Rev. Karen Bockelman is assistant to the bishop in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA. She is presenting an adaptation of this Bible study to the delegates and participants of the Seventh Triennial Convention and Gathering of Women of the ELCA in Salt Lake City, Utah, July 8–10 and 10–13.

SUPPORT
of the
Women ELCA 
WITH PRAYER

Women of the ELCA in Convention and Gathering in Salt Lake City need the support of Women of the ELCA at home.

- > Ask God's blessings on the delegates, new officers and board members, and outgoing officers and board members at the Convention, and on the speakers, worship leaders, chaplains, workshop leaders, and organizers of the Gathering.
- > Ask God's blessings on all those whom the women will meet along the way: flight attendants, pilots, bus drivers, cab drivers, waiters, waitresses, clerks in shops, hotel workers, convention center workers.

SESSION 1

Water, Water Everywhere

by Karen G. Bockelman

First, a word of thanks for your willingness to provide leadership for this session of the summer *LWT* Bible study, “Come to the Waters.” Second, a word of encouragement. Being a Bible study leader doesn’t mean you have to have all the answers. Learning and teaching are the responsibility of the entire group as participants share their own questions and insight.

You can help the group in its study by caring for the details of preparation—setting up a comfortable space and gathering any needed materials. You can also help by welcoming returning and new members, encouraging all to participate, and keeping the discussion on track. You may choose to speak as the leader during the opening and closing of each session, but you are also free to invite others to assume leadership at those times.

Preparation for this session

Whether you’ll be gathering in a room in your church building or someone’s living room or back yard, you’ll want to create a warm, inviting space with enough comfortable chairs for everyone who wants to join in. Create a water focal point, preferably in the center of your circle. For this first session, you’ll need a large bowl and a pitcher of water. You can certainly use whatever is available, but a sparkling clean glass bowl and pitcher would be ideal—that way the water will be visible. The bowl can be set on a low table, covered (if you wish) with a beautiful cloth. Each participant will need a Bible, as well as a copy of Session 1. If needed,

additional copies may be downloaded at www.lutheranwomantoday.org. Although the study uses the New Revised Standard Version, having a variety of translations on hand can add interest to the discussion.

You may also wish to have available one or more Bible concordances. A concordance is an index, with words arranged in alphabetical order, showing the location of each word in the book and often supplying several words of the context in which the word is found. Some study Bibles contain very abbreviated concordances. Your pastor, Christian education director, or church library may be able to provide this resource.

You might also ask your pastor or music director about borrowing hymnals for the group, especially if your congregation uses *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Participants may wish to bring their own Bible and paper for keeping notes.

The hymn that is suggested for the beginning of this session will be unfamiliar to many. It is a new hymn in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. If you have access to a piano (and someone to play!) you can learn this powerful water hymn or you may choose simply to read the words alone or together.

Overview

This first session focuses on the abundance of water and water imagery in the Bible. From the watery chaos before the Creation, through the Flood and the Exodus, beside the psalmist’s still waters where springs gush forth in the desert and justice and righteousness

flow down, at the Jordan River, with the woman at the well and the Ethiopian eunuch, in the river of the waters of life flowing from the throne of God—from the beginning to the end of the Bible, water, in all its multi-layered meanings, is a constant presence. These are the waters to which we are invited.

Generous Water

In a time of reflection or sharing, participants are asked to make note of the water and water-related words in the opening hymn and prayer. If you have copies of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* on hand, you will find additional “Thanksgivings at the Font” on pages 70–71. You may want to spend time exploring the riches of the water words in these prayers. Still another suggestion would be to look at water words to be found in the baptism section of whatever hymnals or songbooks you have available.

Water Everywhere

This section of the study takes a closer look at the chief water narratives lifted up in the service of baptism, especially in the prayer over the water. These are Creation, the Flood, the Exodus, and Jesus’ own baptism. Read the Scripture passages aloud. Each calls for a reflection sharing response. You may find that members of your group respond more easily to one narrative over another. That’s OK. The purpose is to begin to think more deeply about the connection between water and the word, between these narratives and baptism.

Lots of Water

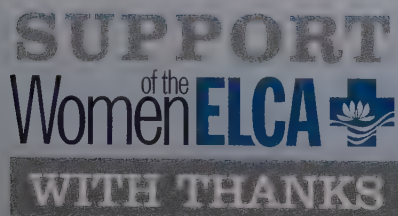
This can be a time to have fun—like the lightning round of a game show. How many biblical stories, images, phrases can your group come up with that have water connections? You may want to divide into pairs or groups of three. However, it’s important to be sensitive to those who have less familiarity with the Bible. You may want to have people use a concordance to look up passages with water or similar words. You may want to have your group concentrate on water imagery in the psalms. You may simply want to concentrate on the stories or passages already listed in the session.

Water Notes

This is an opportunity to at least plan for an activity that takes your learning beyond this time together. You are in a better position to know of your group’s interest in these kinds of activities.

Closing

This closing time is designed to be quite simple—centering once again on water and offering prayers. You may choose to lead the prayer, invite others to lead it, or invite the entire group to read it aloud together. You also have the option to sing or say the opening hymn together once again. Encourage the members of the group to sing or read with feeling, enjoying the refreshingly wet words even more after spending some time splashing in the scriptural waters!



Women of the ELCA will hold a Thankoffering service on Friday, July 11, at the Seventh Triennial Gathering in Salt Lake City. Women at home can join their song of thanks and praise with a Thankoffering in your own gatherings this summer too.

> Send your check to Women of the ELCA, P.O. Box 71256, Chicago IL 60694-1256, and write "Thankoffering" on the memo line. Include the full name and address of your congregation.

> See the article beginning on page 38 for more about how Women of the ELCA in Gathering will give to the needy in Salt Lake City and around the world.



LET US PRAY

Remembering Water

by Debra K. Farrington

She stood there for a few moments blinking the water from her eyes before they wrapped a towel around her and led her off to change into dry clothes. Hers was the most dramatic baptism I've ever seen in a liturgical church. The elegant young woman, dressed in white from head to toe, stepped into a silvery basin, and instead of the more customary sprinkling of water, three large pitchers of water were poured over her head, soaking her. It was hard to miss the fact that her sins had, indeed, been washed away by the water of baptism.

Perhaps her baptism was the inspiration for a spiritual practice that came to me in the shower years later. As I stood there, water cascading over me, I remembered a line from Psalm 51: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." Since then it has become my shower prayer. As water washes away the dirt, I remember my baptism where God washed away my sins, and I ask God to again cleanse my heart as I cleanse my body.

The waters of baptism not only cleanse our sins, however. Baptism signifies our incorporation into the body of Christ. We become inheritors of God's glorious kingdom, and we are asked to live and grow and love within that kingdom, within our communities, in a way that bears witness to the faith that we have embraced. We are welcomed into new life in baptism, and the water that's used—whether it is a gentle sprinkle or a thorough drenching—is life-giving. "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Wash

away my sins. "And put a new and right spirit within me."

Few of us think about our baptism with any regularity, but we would benefit from doing just that. Water, so essential every day of our lives, can become the memory hook, the thing that helps us remember the living water that was poured over us at our own baptisms.

While washing the dishes, laundering clothes, mopping the floor, cleaning your face, or showering, take a moment to remember that the water of baptism was sprinkled or poured over you once, incorporating you into God's glorious kingdom. You might even offer God a short prayer. The line from Psalm 51 is always appropriate or use another favorite line from Scripture. There's nothing wrong with speaking to God from your heart as you remember your baptism.

Any time you use water during the day, remember the gift of your own baptism, and you might find yourself smiling in the midst of washing those dishes or mopping the floor just as a congregation (and God) smiled joyfully when you were baptized.

Resource

Keeping our baptismal promises applies to all aspects of our life, including parenting. *Taking the Plunge: Baptism and Parenting* by the Rev. Anne Kitch (Morehouse, 2006) is a wonderful resource. 🌸

Debra K. Farrington has written eight books of Christian spirituality, including *Hearing with the Heart*, in which you can read more about gifts. See her Web site at www.debrafarrington.com.



Ending poverty and climate change is not beyond our reach.

A world of good

by Christine Grumm

The low-lying South Asian nation of Bangladesh is a perfect example of the one-two punch of poverty and climate change. This small country northeast of India is frequently flooded as cyclones whirl across the Bay of Bengal. These cyclones will only grow worse as polar ice caps melt and ocean levels rise. The result of these fierce storms? Shrinking natural resources. And with fewer resources, the country's struggling people fall deeper into poverty.

Our news media seldom pay attention to Bangladesh's bellwether cycle of climate change and poverty. Too far away, too depressing. But in August 2005, we were forced to confront the realities of climate change on our own doorstep when Hurricane Katrina brought a flood of destruction to New Orleans—hitting the poor especially hard.

Hurricane Katrina forced us to see that America, too, is realizing climate changes and that we also have our share of poor people.

When I think about the 1.3 billion people around the world who live on less than \$1 a day, I am reminded of Matthew 25:35–36, where Jesus says: for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

I, like you, am a busy person. It is difficult to find the time to feed, clothe, and care for those in my community, much less the world, who are living in poverty. I often wonder how, realistically, I can make a difference in the lives of those who are less fortunate. But

continued on page 36

The Women's Funding Network

The Women's Funding Network is made up of 126 women's foundations, and Women of the ELCA is one of them. The organizations in the network give away millions of dollars each year to programs that work to eradicate poverty suffered by women and girls around the world. More than 80 percent of the grants from the foundations in the Women's Funding Network go to women and children affected by poverty, homelessness, human rights abuses, and violence. WFN's strategy focuses on involving women who are most affected. Our network knows that women with first-hand knowledge of poverty and other problems are the women most likely to help find solutions. When solutions are found, they affect not only the lives of the women who experience poverty and all it brings, but also the community in which they live. When a woman can realize economic security, health, and education, then her family and her whole community benefit.

How you can help

The Good Deed Foundation is one program that partners with the Women's Funding Network. The mission of Good Deed is addressing poverty and climate change. You can participate in three ways: by recycling old cell phones, by buying energy-saving light bulbs from Good Deed, and by purchasing products at your local grocery with the Good Deed logo. Nearly two-thirds of Good Deed profits go to the Women's Funding Network Foundation and poverty reduction projects, and almost one-third goes toward preventing climate change. Take these actions to help lift women and girls out of poverty.

- Visit www.gooddeedfoundation.org and order a postage-paid envelope you can use to recycle a used cell phone.
- Go to Good Deed Foundation's Web site and order energy-saving compact fluorescent light bulbs.
- Check Good Deed Foundation's Web site for a list of stores in your area that sell Good Deed branded products.

Manufacturers of products with the Good Deed logo donate a portion of their proceeds to eradicating poverty and addressing climate change. This project is in the beginning stages now, and as more stores carry these products, more money will be donated to the cause. Find out on the Web site how your local grocery can become a Good Deed store.

Answering the call

As women of faith, we are compelled to answer our neighbors' cries for help, no matter if they are in New Orleans or Bangladesh. Your used cell phone is the easiest tool you have to answer those calls. Donating your phone to Good Deed Foundation is easy and fast. About 60 percent of the cell phones recycled through the initiative can be refurbished and resold to help generate revenue for programs supporting women and girls in poverty.

Another portion of the phones collected will be donated to victims of domestic violence for use as emergency 911 phones. As for the rest, their parts are 100 percent recyclable into new electronic equipment. Just think of the positive effects your donation will have!

Why you should help

Why is it important for women of faith to visit the Good Deed Foundation Web site and learn how to help? Consider these facts:

- Women and children make up 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people—both in the United States and around the world—who live on less than \$1 a day;
- American women control \$7 trillion in consumer and business spending and are the lead decision-makers in 76 percent of consumer purchases;
- Women grow half the world's food, but own less than 1 percent of the world's farm land;
- It has been estimated that more than half of the personal wealth in the United States is in the hands of women and this is only expected to grow.

To learn more

If you want to learn more about the work of the Women's Funding Network, visit www.wfnet.org. A first step you can take to end poverty is to go to Good Deed Foundation's Web site at www.GoodDeedFoundation.org to learn more about their climate change solutions and request a postage-paid envelope so you can donate your cell phone for recycling.

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I know I must because Jesus is calling all of us to do something, and I cannot ignore his call.

But there is a way busy women can help. Each and every one of us can participate. Together we can take a significant step toward dismantling poverty and addressing climate change in the United States and around the world.

Did you know that women make almost 80 percent of all consumer decisions in a household? We can use our financial power to change the world. Just the

simple act of recycling a cell phone or buying a light bulb can raise money that can fund programs that tackle climate change and poverty. 🌸

Christine Grumm is Women's Funding Network president and CEO. She has more than three decades of experience as a leader in effecting social change through civil society, and especially through women's philanthropy. Before joining Women's Funding Network, she served as executive director of the Chicago Foundation for Women. Before that she served as deputy secretary of the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva, Switzerland.

boldcafe.org

read. connect. grow.



Café

is a free, monthly on-line magazine for young women offered by Women of the ELCA. Also available as a podcast.



ELCA election resource for 2008

Called to Be a Public Church is a resource guide to encourage congregations and college and seminary communities to participate in this year's election.

The guide encourages voter registration drives, get-out-the-vote campaigns, and poll monitoring. It also contains nonpartisan information on issues related to ELCA social statements. It can be downloaded from the Web at www.elca.org/advocacy/publicchurch or ordered from Augsburg Fortress Publishers (www.augsburgfortress.org; 800-328-4648).

ELCA Global Mission offers free resources

The 2008 Global Mission Annual and a CD showcasing music around the world are two items that are free for the asking from ELCA Global Mission.

If you enjoy mixing a little music with your Bible study or monthly meetings, the Global Mission CD offers six international songs—from Canada, Bolivia, South Africa, Korea, and the Caribbean—with instructions on how to sing them. Some of the songs are also found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

And along with the music, you can use the Global Mission Annual to find out where our missionaries work and what they do. Learn more about ELCA mission strategies for each continent, increase your understanding of the mission model of accompaniment, and find out how you can serve as a missionary by looking through the annual.

To get the CD or annual (or both), call 800-638-3522, ext. 2642. To learn

more about ELCA Global Mission, visit www.elca.org/globalmission.

I Am She: Discovering Your Bold

I Am She, a new program and workbook from Women of the ELCA, is designed to help women discover their inner boldness and act on it. Boldness comes in many forms of ministry, from advocacy to teaching to caring for others.

The workbook helps you learn your dominant bold type in three ACT sessions: Boldness in Advocacy, Boldness in Caring, and Boldness in Teaching. The *I Am She* program and workbook may be used in a congregational setting, as a conference event, or as part of a synodical women's convention. It could be conducted over a five- to six-week period or as a weekend retreat. The flexible format will accommodate the size of your group.

Each participant will need her own copy of the workbook to write in and reflect upon.

The workbook can be downloaded for free on the Women of the ELCA Web site at www.womenoftheelca.org or call 800-638-3522, ext. 2737.

The purpose of this program and workbook is to help each participant:

- gain understanding of her own gifts and bold purpose;
- learn from other bold examples;
- develop a plan to live out her bold; and
- share in community and celebrate the boldness of each participant.

WE RECOMMEND

Resources for
action, advocacy,
programs, or
further study

On July 10, 2008, the Seventh Triennial Gathering of Women of the ELCA will open in Salt Lake City, Utah, with more than 2,500 women coming together to celebrate the joys of service, study, and ministry together. They will not only pray and learn together, they will serve and give. Their generosity will create a ripple effect that will reach out to people in need, not only in Salt Lake City but around the world. And even if you're not able to be there yourself, you can help.

HOW YOU CAN HELP: *Pray*

The first and most important thing you can do is pray. Lift up the women at the Gathering in prayer this month; ask God's abundant blessings on the work of our organization as we come together in Convention and in Gathering, and on the people who will receive the many gifts our women will send, bring, give, make, and distribute at the Gathering. Use the prayer here if you like.

Loving God,
you call your people together in service.
Grant that our sisters at our Gathering
may find their faith refreshed,
their energy renewed,
and their dedication revitalized
by their time together;
and grant that their generosity
in time and treasure
may bring comfort and solace
to all those who receive the gifts
of Women of the ELCA.
Grant that the prayers of your people
may support all our sisters,
in Convention, in Gathering, and at home,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HOW YOU CAN HELP: *Give*

Thankoffering

The Gathering includes a Thankoffering service on Friday evening, July 11. You can have a Thankoffering service in your unit this month too. Send the money you collect by check to Women of the ELCA, P.O. Box 71256, Chicago, IL, 60694-1256 and write "Thankoffering" on the memo line. Include the full name and address of your congregation.

In-Kind Gifts

The Gathering also includes the In-Kind Gift Presentation on Saturday morning, July 12. These gifts to organizations that serve the needy become a ripple effect both in the city where we meet and around the world.

You can gather up and send gift cards and phone cards; you can also send materials that women at the Gathering will use to assemble health kits and school kits, make quilts, blankets, and heart pillows, and knit warm hats and caps.

Gift cards

Any amount from these national retailers are welcome:

- Payless Shoes
- Old Navy
- Sears
- Smith Food and Drug
- Supercuts
- Albertson's and Savon

Pre-paid phone cards

Pre-paid phone cards in any amount can be purchased at national retail stores and grocery stores.

THE PURPOSE STATEMENT OF WOMEN OF THE ELCA

As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.

KEEP UP WITH THE GATHERING ON-LINE We'll keep you posted on the doings at the Gathering on our Web site at www.womenoftheelca.org/tg08. See photos and read the latest news from Salt Lake City!

Quilt kits

Finished quilts will be distributed by Lutheran World Relief as part of the Gathering's global gift. Choose from new, washable fabric. Choose one of the options below and pack in a one-gallon self-locking plastic bag:

Option 1

- 12 21-inch squares of fabric,
- 1 large piece of fabric for backing (either a 2½-yard length of 60" wide fabric or a 5-yard length of 35"/45" wide fabric),
- 1 spool Coats & Clark Dual Duty thread to match.

Option 2

- 2 large pieces of fabric (either 2½-yard lengths of 60" wide fabric or 5-yard lengths of 35"/45" wide fabric),
- 1 spool Coats & Clark Dual Duty thread to match.

School kits

Include the following in a gallon-size, self-locking plastic bag: a package of ballpoint pens, a box of #2 pencils, and an eight-color box of crayons. You can also send packets of 3-hole-punched loose-leaf notebook paper (8½ x 11, wide rule).

Health kits

Select from the following and fill a gallon-size, self-locking plastic bag. Toothbrush and dental floss; shampoo and conditioner; hairbrush and wide-tooth comb; bath-size bar soap, any brand, in its original wrapper; lotion; deodorant (no aerosol cans).

Heart pillow kits

1 yard red cotton broadcloth, 44"/45" wide.

Fleece blanket kits

2 yards polyester fleece, 45" wide.

Knitted preemie caps

2 oz. skeins of soft yarn such as Caron

Knitted toddler & adult hats

3 oz. skeins of worsted weight yarn

How to send your in-kind gifts

Send your in-kind gifts to the Gathering with a friend who is going. (Please don't ship them to the churchwide office—we don't have storage space to hold them.) If there's no one in your congregation who's going, your synod's Triennial Gathering Promoter can put you in touch with someone else from nearby. Need to find out who your TGP is? Contact us by phone, 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2730, or by e-mail at women.elca@elca.org.

Who receives our in-kind gifts?

The following agencies and organizations will share in your kindness in the Salt Lake City area.

Family Promise
Utah Food Bank
Navajo Santa

The Road Home
YWCA Salt Lake City
Back Pack Buddies

Crossroads Urban Center
Primary Children's Hospital



by Terri Lackey

The quilting “girls” at First Lutheran Church, Longview, Texas, needed to raise money for batting. They knew that a bake sale wouldn’t bring in much cash and a car wash was out of the question.

“We have a very limited budget allotted to us each year to buy the batting we use in between the layers of material in our quilts,” said Marie Hacker, the “boss” of the church’s quilting group. “Batting is expensive. It’s about \$10 a roll.” The 22 members donate about 100 quilts a year to Lutheran World Relief.

So what did these women, ages 60 to 92, do? They created a calendar with members of the group serving as models.

“We have such a delightful, upbeat group of girls,” Hacker said. The pastor, Phil Fenton, came up with the idea a couple of years ago, “but nothing ever happened with it.”

Finally, parish nurse Diana Jones said, “We’re going to do this.” The result is a collection of sassy photos of the women in various seasonal scenes. The calendar cover shows them lying on their backs in a circle.

“Can you imagine a group with 90-year-olds lying on the ground in

a circle?” Hacker asked. “Some of us needed some help getting up.”

Thanks to John Nienser, a photographer in the church, the women completed their project in May and June 2007 and made up 350 calendars, which they sold for \$15 each. The calendars have been a big success. Lutheran churches in New York and Kansas heard about the project and bought some of the calendars, Hacker said. By March 2008, they had sold all 350, making more than \$5,000.

Photos in the calendar include women sitting in a convertible toasting the new year, a June bride riding on a motorcycle, a couple of look-alikes standing in an empty swimming pool holding an umbrella, two animal lovers posing with dogs during the dog days of summer, a former cheerleader wearing her uniform from high school, and tailgaters barbecuing in the back of a pickup truck. “We had a great time creating the backdrops and props for the project,” Hacker said. “In almost every picture, we show one of the quilts we’ve made.”

Hacker said she’s not sure the group is ready to undertake the project again next year, but when they are, she’s got an idea.

“I’d like us all to be holding up a bathing suit we dream about wearing.” 🌸

Terri Lackey is managing editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*.



GRACE NOTES

Celebrating Our Baptism

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



April 5, 1959. It was the Second Sunday of Easter, and it was my baptismal day. I was not yet one month old, so I don't recall the event. I have a certificate and a bulletin from that day, though. My parents, Bernice and Dick, were my sponsors and answered on my behalf. They promised to bring me to the word of God and the holy supper, to teach me the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. They promised to place in my hands the Holy Scripture. I still have the white leather-bound, red-letter Bible my parents gave me for Christmas when I was in the second grade. They nurtured me in the faith.

I've seen the baptismal rite repeated hundreds of times since then. Those who love and care for the child or adult being baptized promise to nurture her in the Christian faith, helping her to live in the covenant of baptism. The congregation professes the faith and gives thanks together. The person is baptized and assured: "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." The new Christian is welcomed into the body of Christ.

Many congregations have the practice of remembering baptismal anniversaries of members. Often special prayers are offered for those celebrating baptismal anniversaries, and they are noted in the bulletin. What would it look like in the congregational units of Women of the ELCA if we were to celebrate the baptismal anniversaries

of the participants? How might this strengthen our ministries?

In our purpose statement we pledge to support one another in our callings. As Christians, our callings are grounded in our baptism. So, as participants in Women of the ELCA, we are to support one another in our baptism. Here are a few ways we can do that.

We would begin by loving one another. We would comfort those who mourn and those who are lonely. We would cook a meal for someone recovering from surgery or take someone grocery shopping. We would give an hour to relieve a mother of young children or a caregiver to the elderly.

We would be present with each other, helping each other to eliminate pride, envy, hypocrisy, and apathy. We would bolster each other, encouraging each other to pray and worship. We would squelch uncharitable thoughts about one another and check each other from wasting and polluting the creation God has given to us.

Those who participate in a congregational unit of Women of the ELCA can know each other very well, gathering regularly as we do for study, service, and friendship. Think of those who have been in the same circle for years, studying God's word while walking together through all that life has thrown their way. Those women are blessed to support each other's callings. Isn't that a remarkable thing to celebrate? 🌿

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

Holy Water

by Catherine Malotky

I have had this dream

more than once. I am swimming, calm and effortless. I am moving gracefully and smoothly—I am a part of this universe of water. Beneath the surface, I open my eyes. My hands stretch forward and then cup to draw the water toward me. My fingers float before me, plump and bright in the filtered light. It is quiet.

Sometimes I think it is a memory of being held in my mother's womb, protected by water, caressed, and held by it.

For some, this floating would not be relaxing. For some, water does not conjure calm but fear. Hurricane, riptide, deluge, flash flood, breached levee—we do not welcome this water. This water brings destruction and disaster. When the waters eat away the shore line or cover a basement floor, we know the power of water to destroy and disrupt.

For good and for ill, water is our core. We are made of water, as is our earth. God, I wonder how your well-balanced creation sees us in these days, manipulating the water you have so generously given? We read in the news about growing squabbles between those who have water and those who do not. What rights belong to those who tap the mighty Colorado River for their survival? What consequence awaits those downstream from factories on pristine rivers? And what do the waters say as they are released from ice shelves, pouring into a warming and rising ocean?

Once, on a retreating glacier, I drank water that had fallen to earth more than a century ago, stored for those many

years, pure and clean in the ice. I drank history as it melted away. I have also seen the ground parched and cracked, crops withered at my feet. Too much water flowing or not enough—either way the balance is upset.

What are we doing, God, to your precious gift, the balance and beauty that is your creation? How much of water's destructive force is of our own unleashing, of defying that balance with little thought to the future?

You have used water since you fashioned the creation. You divided the first waters and created order. You claimed water as your instrument of welcome, and washed us clean in baptism. Shall we then continue to be careless with water? Or shall we turn again to see it holy? Can we hold it precious as it holds us in baptism?

Fill us with wonder, God. Teach us to honor our limits, to think of our great-great-grandchildren each time we turn on the faucet. Teach us the wisdom of sustainability, and release us in these summer months from our need for water beyond your providing. Open our eyes to drowning arctic communities (both human and animal), draining reservoirs, and tearing storms. Whether we live where water is abundant or scarce, draw us to love this gift of yours, to honor it as treasure and blessing, to hold it tenderly as it once held us. Amen. 🌿

The Rev. Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.



The sewing circle at Zion Lutheran Church, Litchfield, Minnesota, stitches quilts for all sorts of ministries but one project they are especially proud of is their ministry to a local alcohol and drug treatment center for young people ages 13 to 18. The Zion Sewing Circle welcomes each resident into the program with a unique quilt that includes a message based on Psalms 136 and 139. "We've heard that the quilts become ways to express love and encouragement among the students," writes Dorelle Malmberg, a member of the sewing circle. When the young people graduate from the program, they use the plain back of the quilt to write words of encouragement to each other.

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